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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEGUCIGALPA 002432

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TAGS: [EAIR](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: AIRPORT SECURITY IN HONDURAS: TSA ATTEMPTS TO
NUUDGE GOH ALONG

REF: A. STATE 258046

[B. TEGUCIGALPA](#) 2302

Classified By: EconCouns Robin Matthewman for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Summary: In recent visits to Honduras, TSA Representative Victor Guardia and other TSA inspectors have visited or inspected three of Honduras' four international airports, and raised several airport security issues with GOH officials. In some areas, particularly the September inspection of the airport at San Pedro Sula, Honduras has performed well. However there are certain remaining areas of concern, particularly the need to construct a fence to enhance the protection of the runway at the Roatan airport, and the lack of an adequate, up-to-date national airport security plan. These problems have persisted in part due to the lack of strong leadership from the office of the Director General of Civil Aviation (DGAC). TSA and embassy officials will continue to push the GOH to take steps to strengthen airport security and place a higher priority on this important issue. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Over the past several months, TSA Representative Victor Guardia, as well as other TSA inspectors, have made several visits to Honduras to conduct airport assessments and discuss airport security issues with GOH officials. TSA Representative Guardia visited the island of Roatan in April, and had meetings with Ministry of Transportation officials and the Director of Civil Aviation in Tegucigalpa in May and September. TSA inspectors conducted a comprehensive assessment of the airport in San Pedro Sula in September, and are planning to conduct an assessment of the airport in Roatan in late October. EconOff accompanied Guardia in the meetings above, and held a separate meeting in September with the Vice Minister of Transport (to whom the Director of Civil Aviation reports) to discuss certain concerns at a higher level.

San Pedro Sula Airport Receives Good Marks

¶3. (SBU) In September, two TSA inspectors performed a comprehensive assessment of Ramon Villeda Morales International Airport in San Pedro Sula. The overall sense of the inspectors was "very positive", and while the inspectors made a few minor recommendations, there were no open items to report at the end of their assessment. Open items from the previous assessment, including a proper I.D. badge control system and the security of the catering area, had been adequately corrected.

¶4. (C) The inspectors happened to be in the airport when information about a security threat (ref a) prompted airport authorities to implement their "contingency plan", raising their security posture from Level 1 to Level 2. Note: this contingency plan, in accordance with ICAO standards, has four levels of operations: Level 1 for normal operations, Level 2 for increased awareness, Level 3 in response to specific intelligence information, and Level 4 for direct threat. End note. The inspectors were pleased with the organization and execution of the exercise, noting that employees seemed to know what they were supposed to do and that resources were being allocated wisely.

But Progress is Slow on Roatan

¶5. (U) The Juan Manuel Galvez airport on the island of Roatan presents a less positive example of airport security in Honduras. Fourteen families actually live on the grounds of the Roatan airport, and until recently there was nothing at all separating their houses from the airport runway. As a result, residents of these houses were able to walk around or cross the runway area to the other side where the ocean forms the airport's perimeter line.

¶6. (U) TSA Representative Victor Guardia first observed this state of affairs during a visit to Roatan in April 2003, and as an immediate, if temporary, solution, recommended that guards be stationed between the houses and the runway 24 hours a day. These guards were put in place quickly and have

remained in place ever since. Guardia then personally brought the problem to the attention of the Minister and Vice-Minister of Transport and the Director General of Civil Aviation (DGAC) during another visit in May.

¶7. (U) The ideal long-term solution would be to remove the families from the airport grounds entirely, but the government apparently has neither the financial resources to provide compensation, nor the political will to fight the legal and public relations battle that this would entail. As a medium-term solution, Guardia recommended the construction of an internal fence to separate the residential area from the runway and other sensitive parts of the airport. InterAirports, the consortium which operates Honduras' four international airports, declared their willingness to build such a fence, identified the money to pay for the project and selected a contractor. They estimate that construction will take 4 to 5 weeks, and since July they have been ready to begin building the fence at any time. However, they have requested from the DGAC written authorization to proceed before they begin construction. (Note: Given the problematic legal climate in Honduras generally, especially in the Bay Islands and especially in matters of property disputes, this request seems entirely justified. End note.)

¶8. (U) Twice in recent months Civil Aviation Director Cesar Vasquez has assured USG officials that written authorization would be granted and delivered to InterAirports in a matter of days, only to be delayed. As of early October, the authorities on Roatan are apparently unwilling to grant written authorization to build the fence without another face-to-face meeting with Vasquez. According to Vice Minister of Transport Pavon, the families resident on the airport grounds were promised indemnification by the previous administration. They feel that, once the internal fence is constructed, the government will forget about the issue entirely and ignore the families' claims for compensation. The families do not trust the government's promises, and feel that allowing the fence to be built would cost them their only bargaining chip. Meanwhile the runway, which services direct weekly flights to the United States, remains protected by 24-hour guards, but not by any permanent structure.

¶9. (U) Airport authorities have responded promptly to other suggestions made by Guardia to enhance the security of the airport perimeter, which as of October is now reportedly secure. Note: TSA is planning to perform a comprehensive assessment of the airport on Roatan from October 22-28. This will be the first full assessment of the airport since 1998, since for several years there were no direct flights from Roatan to the United States. The inspectors will also inspect Sol Air and Taca, the air carriers operating flights from Roatan to the U.S. End note.

At the National Level: In Need of a Plan, and Leadership

¶10. (C) At the national level, the largest outstanding airport security issue is the lack of an adequate National Civil Aviation Security Program (NCASP). The current plan has not been revised since 1997, and is in many ways obsolete - Director of Civil Aviation Cesar Vasquez himself admits as much. For example, the current NCASP tasks the "airport police" with certain security functions, but the "airport police" have not existed as a unit since the police and armed forces of the country were re-organized in 1999. The current plan also falls short of numerous ICAO standards, such as the requirement that regular inspections of the nation's airports be carried out, or the need for a formal training program for airport employees with security functions.

¶11. (C) The need for a revised, ICAO-compliant NCASP was formally brought to the attention of Director of Civil Aviation Vasquez back in August 2002. As of TSA Representative Guardia's most recent visit in September 2003, however, very little progress had been made on drafting a new plan. Vasquez could only report that he plans to hire a consultant to revise the NCASP, and that the terms of reference for this consultant are currently being drafted. TSA Representative Guardia stressed that he is willing to

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assist with the process, and that the essential required content of the plan is already clearly defined in the ICAO Annex 17.

InterAirports Tries to Fill the Gap

¶12. (U) In the absence of an adequate NCASP, InterAirports wrote their own operational plan, and sent it to the DGAC in October 2002 for comments and approval. The DGAC waited 8 months before replying, then returned the plan to InterAirports in May 2003 without a single change or

recommendation, and with the Director of Civil Aviation's signature back-dated to October 2002 to remove the appearance that the DGAC had been slow to respond. This lack of leadership on behalf of the DGAC led the InterAirports Operations Manager to comment recently that the company "feels like an orphan" when it comes to airport security - trying to do the right thing, but without any direction or guidance from the GOH's lead agency for airport security. (See ref b for more information on InterAirports' current relationship with the GOH.)

¶13. (SBU) Comment: The status quo on airport security appears to be workable, but far from perfect. Embassy plans to work closely with TSA to push the GOH to take steps to strengthen airport security and raise the profile of this important issue. End comment.

Palmer